

PUBLISHED IN ADVANCE OF INCORPORATION
IN FPM Ch. 331
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FPM LTR. 331-1

Official Record Copy

Office of Personnel

-7 DEC 1965

UNITED STATES CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

FEDERAL PERSONNEL MANUAL SYSTEM

LETTER

FPM LETTER NO. 331-1

Washington, D.C. 20415

December 14, 1965

SUBJECT: Modernizing the Recruiting and Examining System

Heads of Departments and Independent Establishments:

The Civil Service examining system, guiding the career staffing of the Federal Departments and agencies, is of paramount importance to the effective conduct of the Nation's business. The system must not only measure merit in accordance with public policy, but also serve as a means of attracting to the Federal service the best qualified in the employment marketplace. It must be responsive to the demands of Federal programs and sensitive to the expectations of the public served. It must operate in an environment of efficiency and economy.

For that reason, the Civil Service Commission has made an intensive review and evaluation of the present system of examinations and the organization through which it is carried out. The purpose of this review was to make sure that this system is fully effective in meeting the employment needs of today and is fully responsive to the public's right to compete for available jobs on the basis of merit. As a result, the Commission, with the full endorsement of the President, has decided to undertake an extensive program of modernization of the total recruiting and examining system. (The exchange of correspondence between the President and Chairman Macy is attached for your information.)

The new program will substantially revise the present pattern of staffing and placement at grades GS-1 through GS-15, and for Wage Board jobs. It will simplify, quicken, and adapt to today's needs our present methods, strengthening our efforts to obtain employees of the highest calibre, when and where we need them, with the training and competence demanded by our national goals and a dynamic technology. It will aid us immeasurably in our overriding purpose of providing to all qualified citizens an equal opportunity to compete on the basis of merit for Federal positions.

INQUIRIES: BRE, Inter-Agency Boards, Code 183, extension 7619

CSC CODE 331 Organization for Recruitment and Examination
Approved For Release 2002/03/29 : CIA-RDP80-01826R000300130070-2

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With the changing nature of the labor market and the population upsurge, more applications for Federal employment for each position filled must be handled, and employment information must be made available to more people.

The Equal Employment Opportunity program demands wider publicity of opportunity and more frequent examinations.

Our national youth programs and the increasing numbers of young people each year entering the employment market emphasize the Commission's responsibility for assuring that each qualified applicant is accorded the maximum opportunity for consideration for Federal employment. Graduates of our educational system must be offered such opportunity when they graduate.

Our ability to respond to these needs is enhanced by these features of the new program which make it possible to fully utilize the growing Commission capacity in the use of automatic data processing equipment for the more routine, repetitive phases of the examining process.

The Current System

The partnership arrangement between the Departments and agencies with the Commission in the administration of the examining program has served for many years as an outstanding example of interdepartmental cooperation. Under the new program, we expect this collaboration to continue and increase in effectiveness, though within a different context.

The Civil Service Act of 1883 provided for Boards of Civil Service Examiners but drew no line of distinction between what the Commission would do "in house" and what would be done by Boards.

Under the influence of the conversion period following World War II, the number of Boards increased enormously and piecemeal, frequently under the pressure of expediency and often as the result of Commission-agency negotiations undertaken to respond to an immediate examining need.

One result of this expanding Board of Examiners system has been a delegation of recruiting and examining authority to a large number of semi-autonomous jurisdictions. At present, 668 separate Boards throughout the country announce examinations, evaluate applications, and refer names of eligible candidates for employment consideration.

The program proposed responds to one of the major findings of our study-- that a clearer, sharper line must be drawn between the operational functions of the Commission and those of the Boards.

The existing Boards issue examination announcements which, for the most part, are designed for specific agencies served by individual Boards, and tend to be narrow in scope. They also tend to cover one particular part of a broad occupation rather than the whole occupation. The large number of small Boards prevents coordination among them, so that sometimes there is duplication of recruiting and examining effort and sometimes a lack of any coverage at all. Because of this complex dispersion of the recruiting and examining activity, the public-information task is exceedingly difficult.

The New System

Inter-Agency coordination and cooperation will be the foundation of the new program. The present 668 Boards of Examiners will be consolidated into a basic network of 65 Inter-Agency Boards, located in selected centers of both general and Federal populations. Each Board will serve a clearly defined geographic segment. A map showing the locations and geographic territories of each of these Boards is attached.

An Inter-Agency Board will be composed of agency managers, acting as a Board of Directors, and representing the agencies located in a particular area. Rating panels will be made up (as at present) of agency specialists. Boards will continue to operate under the supervision of the Commission.

The outstanding success of the twelve Federal Executive Boards in the recent past clearly shows the remarkable achievements possible through concerted action by Federal executives. We strongly believe that the coordination between the Commission and the agencies called for by this program will constitute another important step toward attaining throughout the Government the rapid and effective action that accompanies true inter-agency management.

The new Inter-Agency Boards will be staffed by full-time Executive Officers and employees on the rolls of the Civil Service Commission, superseding the present arrangement in which Board staffs are carried on the rolls of participating agencies. Under the program's financing plan to be established under the authority of 31 U.S.C. 691, the agencies will reimburse the Commission for the expenses of Board operations on a proportionate-share basis.

Under the new plan, the Civil Service Commission:

- o will provide leadership, supervision, and general recruiting support,
- o will announce, schedule, and score large-volume written tests, using the latest computer techniques, and speed the results to the Inter-Agency Boards.

The Inter-Agency Board:

- ° will develop imaginative and vigorous recruitment programs in cooperation with the participating agencies,
- ° will evaluate the experience and training of candidates,
- ° will maintain lists of eligibles and refer eligibles to employing agencies,
- ° will operate a one-stop Federal job information center so that interested citizens, including graduates of the Job Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, can be counseled on job opportunities and will no longer have to visit a number of Government offices to get the information they need,
- ° will give strong support to our efforts to become an equal opportunity employer in every sense,
- ° will assist in identifying highly able employees for possible reassignment, transfer and promotion to jobs of greater responsibility throughout the service.

Plan and Timetable for Installation of the Changes

The Commission's plan is to begin implementation of the new system immediately. It is expected that the first Inter-Agency Boards will be established by July 1, 1966 and the complete network will start operation by January 1, 1967.

However, the installation of changes in examinations and in the examination process will be more gradual. The assumption of the examinations handled by the current Boards of Examiners, and consequently the phase-out of existing Boards will also be gradual and will be accomplished with full consideration to the placement of personnel currently assigned to Board work without adverse affect on any of these persons.

We also recognize that the new system will not accomodate to every need in the multitude of occupations and geographic locations which form the complex of the Federal workforce and establishment. Therefore, in the installation phase the Commission's offices will work closely with all Federal agencies to provide responsive examining arrangements and to continue present single agency Boards where they are justified and clearly necessary to meet the staffing requirements.

Agency officials, formally and informally, have been of immeasurable help to the Commission in evaluating the present system and in designing the program of improvement. Continued cooperation of this type is even more necessary in installing the changes and in tailoring them to individual staffing needs and problems. As a means for this continued cooperation, the Commission is establishing a special committee within the Inter-Agency Advisory Group to advise and assist us in meeting the objective of modernization and improvement.

Among its early efforts, this committee will be asked to assist the Commission and the Bureau of the Budget in establishing the formula through which the expenses of the Inter-Agency Boards will be reimbursed. We also expect the committee to devote special attention to the critical needs of the service for engineering, scientific, and other technical and professional skills which are in short supply.

Each Federal agency is requested to urge its management and personnel officials at every level to join efforts with the Commission in installing the program of modernization so that, at its completion, the Federal Government's recruiting and examining system will provide improved service to the public and well qualified job candidates for every agency program need.



Nicholas J. Oganovic
Executive Director

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